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Media

TV News Controversy

A group of men and women who write, research and sometimes broadcast editorials at some of the nation's top commercial television stations are currently locked in an internal argument over whether to publicly criticize the Nixon administration for its recent attacks on the media.

The 15-member board of directors of the National Broadcast Editorial Association, which represents about 60 members around the country, was asked in December to approve a resolution drawn up by board member Wes Bowen of KSL-TV in Salt Lake City.

Bowen's draft attacked a White House legislative proposal which would hold local TV stations accountable at license renewal time for the balance and taste of all network news and entertainment programs.

Bowen said yesterday that his resolution had been defeated in a telephone poll of the board conducted by the NBEA's secretary-treasurer, Fred Dresser, in Denver.

However, Bryson Rash of WRC (Channel 4) here, said yesterday the resolution hasn't been turned down at all. Rash is president of the group, which was formed five weeks ago at a Nassau meeting after years of existence as a TV editorial writers conference.

Rash said that during the telephone poll, a motion was made by NBEA Vice President Peter Kohler of WCBS in New York to table the Bowen resolution pending a Chicago board meeting in mid-February.

At that time, Rash said yesterday, the board could determine if "one of its functions is to get into statements like this." Rash said that as a result of the motion the vote on the resolution was never completed and even the poll on the motion has yet to be tabulated.

Rash said it was his impression that the board favored the Bowen resolution but that the new group wanted to "get things squared away" first.

Advised of Rash's comments, Bowen reiterated yesterday evening that he had been told flatly that the resolution had failed to carry. He contended that in any case, the effect was the same. "Someone is trying to maintain a low profile," he said. "Tabling this now takes off the edge . . . this thing isn't in February, it's happening now. A vote to table it is the same as a vote of nay."

Dressler, in Denver, said that the "resolution was clearly ahead" when polling stopped as a result of the motion to table. "Bowen's just mad at the parliamentary move," according to Dressler.

The proposals that angered Bowen, who is corporate director of community affairs at KSL, were contained in a speech last Dec. 18 delivered by Dr. Clay T. Whitehead, director of the Office of Telecommunications Policy.

Whitehead's attack on TV news was delivered in Indianapolis, Ind., as he outlined proposed changes in the Broadcasting Act of 1934 designed to ease license renewal requirements for broadcasters.

—*John Carmody*